



## DENTAL CARE FOR TEENS

### STORY IDEAS

Think tooth decay is a problem you have outgrown along with Barbie dolls or Pokemon cards? Not true! Tooth decay – as well as gum disease that can cause bad breath – can be more of a serious problem in your teens than at any other time of your life. Find out why you may get your first cavity at the same time you get your driver's license, and what you can do to protect the health and look of your smile.

With their hectic school schedules and busy social lives, teens have it tough as they assume responsibility for their own dental health and eating habits. They can do a good job protecting their smiles in just minutes a day by following a few straightforward rules.

Thin is not always beautiful! Eating disorders pose serious health risks, especially to young women. Signs of these disorders often show clearly in the mouth. Pediatric dentists are on the first line of defense in identifying teens who suffer from eating disorders.

If you are thinking jewelry – and you are thinking piercing – think your ears, NOT your mouth. Mouth jewelry can chip your teeth and get in the way of eating comfortably or speaking clearly. Bottom line: Oral piercing poses a number of risks, including pain, swelling and infection.

### FIVE ESSENTIAL FACTS FOR TEENS

1. You have not outgrown your need for dental visits – or your pediatric dentist. Dentistry for adolescents and teens is an important part of the advanced training of a pediatric dentist.
2. Gum disease (also called periodontal disease or gingivitis) is not just a risk to your dental health, but also to your appearance. It affects six out of ten teenagers, causing red or swollen gums, bleeding gums or bad breath. The best prevention is brushing, flossing and regular dental visits.
3. As your body grows during the teen years, your face and jaws will grow and change as well. During the teen years, you probably will lose your last baby teeth, get your remaining permanent teeth, and experience growth in the face and jaw. You can be healthy and attractive through these changes by taking good care of your teeth and visiting your pediatric dentist.
4. By the end of your teen years, you probably will get the last of your permanent teeth, called wisdom teeth or third molars. Although some third molars come into the mouth normally, others need to be removed because of their position or lack of space. Your pediatric dentist will make sure any treatment needed for your third molars takes place at the right time for you.
5. If your teeth are chipped or discolored, new treatments in cosmetic dentistry can restore the look of your smile. Talk to your pediatric dentist about treatment choices to help you feel more confident about your appearance.

## WHY YOU MAY GET YOUR FIRST CAVITY JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE TOO OLD FOR IT

The good news: Dental decay in America is decreasing. The bad news: The decay rate is highest during adolescence. Tooth decay can be more of a problem during your teen years than at any other time of your life because:

- ▲ You have a number of new permanent teeth, and teeth that have just come through the gums are more prone to decay.
- ▲ Because almost all of your teeth have come in, you simply have more tooth surfaces susceptible to decay.
- ▲ You are more independent when it comes to seeking dental appointments – or avoiding them. Some teens do not visit their pediatric dentist as often as they did when Mom drove them.
- ▲ You are more in charge of your eating habits and oral health care than ever before. You may not eat healthy foods as regularly as you used to, or brush and floss as often.

## WHAT'S THE SOLUTION TO FIGHTING TOOTH DECAY? HEALTHY EATING HABITS, FLUORIDE, SEALANTS, BRUSHING, FLOSSING, AND REGULAR VISITS TO YOUR PEDIATRIC DENTIST.

### DENTAL HEALTH CHECKLIST FOR TEENS

An important change at this time in your life is taking responsibility for your dental health and eating habits. You can protect your health, smile, and overall appearance with the following checklist.

- ▲ Did you know the average teen eats nine times a day? Choose wisely! Even though your schedule is hectic and you eat on the run, you can select fresh fruits and vegetables instead of junk foods. Cheese, popcorn and yogurt are healthy alternatives to high-fat or high-sugar snacks. For the sake of your dental health and your waistline, do not let snacks take the place of nutritionally balanced meals.
- ▲ When you do not have time to brush after a snack or a meal, clear the food from your teeth with a swish and rinse of water. Or try sugarless gum. Although it is not in the same league as brushing in terms of effectiveness, it can help prevent tooth decay.
- ▲ Brush twice a day – after breakfast and before bed – with fluoride toothpaste. Floss once a day to prevent gum disease and tooth decay on the sides of the teeth.
- ▲ Do not smoke or chew tobacco. (According to the Centers for Disease Control, about one-third of high schoolers smoke and one-fifth of teen boys use chewing tobacco.) Besides lung and heart problems, tobacco can cause oral cancer. If you are using tobacco and notice any changes in your mouth, contact your pediatric dentist immediately.
- ▲ Wear a mouthguard during any sport or activity in which your mouth can be hit. A mouthguard is essential sports equipment not just for football and hockey, but also for such activities as soccer, basketball, baseball, snowboarding and gymnastics.



- ▲ Buckle up in the car. A seat belt and shoulder harness can keep your face from striking the steering wheel, the dashboard or windshield during even minor accidents. And please, do not forget your helmet when you head out on your bicycle, motorcycle, skateboard or rollerblades.
- ▲ Skip the mouth jewelry. Piercing your tongue, cheek or lip can pose greater risks than piercing such other places as your ear or eyebrow. During or right after the piercing, you face the chance of severe bleeding if the needle hits a blood vessel, infection from the bacteria in your mouth, and difficulty in breathing if your tongue swells. Down the road, you face the risk of recurrent infection, injury to the sensitive tissues in your mouth, chips or cracks in your teeth from contact with the jewelry, and choking if the hoop, stud or barbell comes loose. Finally, although some people get used to mouth jewelry, others find it difficult to speak and chew.
- ▲ Visit your pediatric dentist twice a year. Teeth cleanings, fluoride treatments and sealants are still important for you to prevent tooth decay, gum disease and bad breath.

## BENEFITS OF A HEALTHY SMILE

- ▲ Brighter smile
- ▲ Fresher breath
- ▲ More self-assurance when you talk and laugh
- ▲ Greater confidence in your appearance
- ▲ More comfort when you eat your favorite foods
- ▲ Better attendance and attention in school
- ▲ Better overall health
- ▲ Lower dental bills for your parents

## QUIZ ON EATING DISORDERS

You (or a friend) may have an eating disorder if you answer YES to the following questions.

1. Do you weigh yourself more than once a day?
2. Are you obsessed with being very thin, even while you are below a normal weight?

3. Do you have a fear of not being able to stop eating?
  4. Do you vomit after a meal – or have the urge to do so?
  5. Do you exercise excessively, several times a day for long periods of time?
  6. (For females only) Have you missed three consecutive menstrual periods?
- Eating disorders, especially bingeing and purging, can damage the teeth because of stomach acid. All eating disorders have health risks. The worst cases can lead to death. If you suspect you have an eating disorder, please see your doctor as soon as possible.

## GREAT QUOTES

*"It's my teen patients who suffer the most frequent – and most severe – facial injuries. Mouth protectors are must-have equipment for the gym and playing field. And if you are heading out with your rollerblades, scooter, skateboard or bike, please remember to wear your helmet. Eight out of ten teens forget."*

*"You may have outgrown all of your toys, most of your clothes, and some of your friends. But you have not outgrown tooth decay. In fact, 84 percent of teenagers have had a cavity by age 17."*

## VISUAL POSSIBILITIES

Follow a teen through a visit in a pediatric dental office  
Photos of different types of mouthguards  
Photos of a selection of healthy snacks

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Ms. Gina Sandoval  
Communications Manager  
American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry  
211 East Chicago Avenue, Suite 700  
Chicago, Illinois 60611-2663  
Phone: 312-337-2169  
Fax: 312-337-6329  
E-mail: [gsandoval@aapd.org](mailto:gsandoval@aapd.org)  
[www.aapd.org](http://www.aapd.org)